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CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT ON VISIT TO EAST TIMOR

DECEMBER 15 - 17, 1991

I was invited by the Secretariat of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia to accompany its Secretary and Director of its Development Agency - LPPS/Caritas Indonesia - on a "Christmas Solidarity Visit" to East Timor. The visit took place at very short notice, having been brought forward on the request of the President of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference. It coincided with part of the visit of the Vatican delegate to East Timor.

My participation in the visit followed:

- the recommendation of the Australian Parliamentary delegation to East Timor in the middle of 1991 that ACR look at possible involvement in East Timor.

- the decision, at its October 1991 Meeting, by ACR to look at ways of becoming involved in programs in East Timor, working in partnership with LPPS.

- the recent events in East Timor leading up to the November 11th "incident" when probably over 100 Timorese were killed by the Indonesian military. These events focussed, once again, Australian and world attention on East Timor.

I accompanied Fr. Hardaputranta, Director of LPPS, and Sister Francesca of the LPPS Staff to East Timor. They carried with them the ACR grant of $20,000 to assist the victims and their families of recent events in East Timor.

The visit took place immediately prior to the visit to Jakarta of Australia's Foreign Minister, Senator Evans. Two AIDAB staff from Jakarta were in Dili at the same time preparing background information for Senator Evans's visit. As they met different people to those we met, we were able to exchange some information.

The three day visit was deliberately short as it was thought this was appropriate at this time. We extensively toured Dili, and visited Dare (some 15km from Dili) to see an Agricultural program in operation there. Most of our time was spent in discussions with a wide variety of people, related to the Church, on the past, current and future situation in East Timor. I concentrated on listening to their views and recommendations on what the Australian Church and ACR should be doing and saying both now and in the future.

We met with Bishop Belo. Unfortunately the Governor had been, and was, ill so a visit could not be arranged.

We had ten meetings with Priests, Sisters and a few lay people and they covered a wide spectrum of views on the extremely complicated situation in East Timor. I will not name those whom we met - at their request. The Australian Ambassador named some of them as sources of information following his recent visit to East Timor, and this made several of them very nervous about talking to me. However, I was able to meet with all the key figures in the Church - Timorese, Indonesian and Foreigners.

OBSERVATIONS:

1. It is tempting to become an "expert" after three days in a country, I will try to avoid this. The observations made here are those of the people we met - together with some analysis provided by our colleagues from LPPS.

2. ACR is very fortunate to have its partnership with LPPS in helping it to understand East Timor. While the people of East Timor are naturally suspicious of Indonesians, the role LPPS, and Fr. Hardaputranta, have played over the past 15 years - as the major source and channel for international support - has led to an openness on the part of all sectors of the Church to communicate freely with him.

3. East Timorese are living in a state of fear. Indonesian migrants in East Timor, especially those in the east of the country, are living in fear. The word "hatred" was used by most people we met.

After 7 pm, the streets of Dili empty very quickly. By 8 pm it is as though there was a curfew. No one ventures outside their houses. There are no taxis and only the occasional car. This is a new occurrence over the past few months.

A visitor to Dili quickly feels the tension that pervades the whole population. There is also considerable division of opinion - even in Church circles. These divisions relate to the perceptions of the most effective response to the Indonesian presence in East Timor. While it is clear that most people do not accept the legitimacy of the Indonesian takeover of East Timor, it is a fact that the Indonesians are in control of the major power structures in East Timor and their administration of these structures can only be described as ruthless.

4. There had been limited improvement in the day to day living situation of the East Timorese up until the announcement of the visit of the Parliamentary delegation. This visit raised hopes, threats and uncertainty and also raised all the old divisions in East Timor. The Bishop described the period as "like living in hell".

The November 11th massacre (referred to as "event" in East Timor) was one result of this tension and unrest - not the cause of it. The impression gained from the contacts I had was that there was a deliberate decision made by the Indonesians to silence demonstrators and eliminate dissent in this period. However the massacre itself resulted from a local on the spot decision.

We spent a lot of time discussing the political situation following these recent events. The Bishop and all those with whom we spoke were positive about their contacts with the Commission set up by the Indonesians to investigate the massacre and correct the inaccurate statements being made by the Indonesians about the massacre. I was given figures of in excess of 100 people dead or missing, 41 in hospital and 40 arrested as a result of the events on November 11th.

They expressed some confidence in the Commission presenting an accurate report but stated that any action resulting from it would be up to President Soeharto. We were told that it was essential that the results of the investigation were made public and communicated widely in East Timor, Indonesia and internationally.

There was doubt expressed about the value of a United Nations investigation. The military surveillance of those who spoke to the Indonesian Commission was high. There was doubt whether Timorese would feel free, or even be able, to speak to such a public international investigation team. It was stated that the ongoing situation of the East Timorese people would not benefit from such an investigation.

5. The Bishop, and others, stated that pressure should be brought on the Indonesian Government to, at least, grant special status to East Timor, as it had done to the provinces of Aceh and Jogjakarta. This would allow East Timor to develop in its own way recognising its unique culture, among the diversity of cultures that exist in Indonesia. The Bishop and the people want a change in the security mechanism for East Timor, with the military presence reduced and more involvement by East Timorese in the institutions of Government, including the military and police. Any new Governor should be an East Timorese acceptable to the people.

6. The ongoing pressure on the Timorese can be seen from the increased security measures. Many of these measures had been dropped but had now been re-introduced. Checkpoints and roadblocks are common all around Dili. There is also a policy of intimidation with a very obvious military presence - small army outposts, army men in trucks regularly patrolling the streets, military exercises taking place in the streets around Dili.

It was stated by many of those whom we met that the process of reaching some form of accommodation between the Indonesians and the East Timorese had been set back at least 10 years by these recent events.

7. There were no restrictions on travelling into East Timor or around Dili. Arriving at Dili was like arriving at a large country airport with no checks being made on arriving passengers or no apparent military presence - I was the only non Indonesian/Timorese on the flight into Dili.

However there was little evidence of a foreign presence in Dili. In the days I was there the only Europeans I saw were the missionaries based in the minor seminary, three ICRC personnel and the AIDAB representative. Three of us left on the same plane!

8. The economic plight of the East Timorese is very serious. The past 17 years of Indonesian occupation has done nothing to improve the living conditions of the East Timorese from those that existed during the period of Portuguese colonisation. The Indonesian Government has poured considerable amounts of money into East Timor but this has been used for highly visible infrastructure projects - roads, polytechnics, buildings, a new airport terminal, even a massive new Cathedral - and there have been no projects to improve the living conditions of people outside the major centres.

Even the inflow of funds for these capital works has provided very little indirect benefit to the East Timorese. The workers involved in construction and operation of these projects have been brought into East Timor from Indonesia. East Timorese are not employed on the projects and are further left behind in their own country.

Few resources have been provided to utilise the buildings etc., many of which remain as "shells" that look useful but are not effectively operational.

9. The current situation of the majority of the East Timorese is of grave concern. The population has risen from 390,000 in 1976 to 720,000 in 1991. 120,000 people now live in Dili - many of the newcomers to the city in substandard accommodation. There is inadequate food with people subsisting on limited amounts of indigenous staple crops. In the towns, unemployment is growing and is now over 20% in Dili. There are very few possibilities for young people to get jobs after leaving school.

Malnutrition, especially among children, is widespread. Provincial authorities told the AIDAB personnel that the level of malnutrition among children going to school was extremely high and this was preventing them from receiving an adequate education. They suggested that one of the immediate needs for East Timor was a feeding program for children.

No efforts have been made to improve agricultural production. There has been no introduction of new technologies or encouragement to grow the crops necessary to improve the nutrition of people.

The situation in the immediate future is not bright. The rains were already six weeks late and there was a fear that a drought was developing that would be disastrous for many people in East Timor.

10. The education system is not effective and is not meeting the needs of the Timorese. There is very little discipline or morale in the schools with teachers turning up irregularly and children only being present for two or three hours a day and even then attending in a lethargic way (due to their living conditions). Teachers are ill equipped to carry out their tasks and they receive no motivation to improve their performance. The educational methodology is very formal, general and not related to the needs and future of the children. Students tend to be silent and passive. The schooling does not prepare students to cope with an agricultural environment and there is no future in the towns once schooling is finished.

There are some post-school polytechnics which are also inappropriate to the needs of students. They tend to be modern large buildings with modern equipment. Students graduating from them have no openings for employment and the facilities on which they have been trained are not available in their own communities. Regrettably there are some Church institutions in this category.

The Catholic School System educates about 18% of the students in East Timor. Catholic schools appear to be better than the Government ones with more motivation, discipline and a higher standard, particularly at the elementary and primary levels. However it, too, lacks resources.

11. Catholics make up 80% of the East Timorese population. The Catholic Church is the only major independent institution in East Timor. However its effectiveness is affected because of a number of factors including its Portuguese background, its lack of resources and the wide variety of opinions and divisions among Church people on how to address the challenges it is facing.

The Church was described to me as one that has been, and still is in most cases, only ceremonial and sacramental. It is being challenged to become more involved in the issues facing the East Timorese. The way that it should do this is the basis of the divisions in the Church. These divisions are focussed on differences between the young and the old; between the East Timorese Diocesan Clergy and Religious and the expatriate (including Javanese); and in the role of lay involvement. I was told that even among the members of one of the religious orders there were three different approaches to the challenges facing East Timor.

There is a real effort being made to address these differences and I believe that the current crisis is playing a role in accelerating this. Bishop Belo is playing a crucial, but very difficult, role in this process. His welcoming, open and relaxed manner certainly hides the pressure he must be under.

The structure of the Church is weak. The Church is under pressure and currently the Bishop and many of his priests and religious, especially the East Timorese, are being accused by the military of playing a leading role in the demonstrations against Indonesian involvement in East Timor.

On many occasions I was told that the Church in East Timor needs the ongoing support of the Universal and neighbouring Churches to help it play its role in East Timor. Several people, including the Bishop, commented most favourably on the statement made by Cardinal Clancy at the Mass on December 7th. They were all aware of what he said. "We have a debt to the Australian Church - we do not know how to thank you", was the comment of one of those I met.

There is a lack of resources, both personnel and material, available to the Church, especially. While one or two of the religious orders are apparently well supported in their activities, concern was expressed about the distribution of available resources among all sections of the Church's apostolate and particularly those where the East Timorese themselves are responsible. For example, while the Diocesan Secretariat is housed in a large, most impressive building on a large block of ground on the waterfront (no doubt dating from the days of Portuguese influence), it has very little equipment. There are some old model manual typewriters. The Diocese does not even own a photocopier and so even the Bishop's pastoral letters have to be photocopied at one of the shops in town (where no doubt the security forces would have access). The Bishop does not have a secretary.

12. Discussions were held with the Bishop and other Church leaders about an appropriate way to assist the Church to respond to the human needs of the people of East Timor. It was agreed that the local Social Action structure based on the Indonesian model was not the most effective way. It was agreed that Caritas Dili be established.

There is a need at both the Diocesan and Parish level to have suitably trained people available to act as motivators in the development of programs to help people improve their living conditions. People need to be recruited, trained and supported for at least the first three years if the Church is to have an effective involvement in Social Action.

It was agreed that as a first step in this process, a training program for the Diocesan Social Action staff and 20 Parish motivators would be held in Jakarta as soon as this could be arranged - probably in June.

LPPS has agreed to set up a desk to assist in the development of Caritas Dili and has invited ACR to form a partnership with it in this special activity. ACR's initial involvement would be to assist in funding the training program (approximately $15,000) and to provide funding to employ the 20 motivators for a three year (only) period (approximately $20,000). Some funding would also be required to support the small projects that would come from the activities of the motivators. These would most likely focus on agricultural activities. An initial block grant could be made available to Caritas Dili to fund these projects - but funding for these could also come from other sources such as APHD.

MY COMMENTS:

The situation in East Timor is as serious now as it has been at any time during the past 17 years. The tension and frustration among the East Timorese must be building up until it becomes intolerable. With no freedom and very little opportunity to build an acceptable way of life for themselves, more and more people, especially the young, will take action - either as part of the organised resistance or independently - to change the situation in East Timor. The Indonesians appear to be taking a harder line on dissent and are prepared to take whatever action is necessary to repress it. More bloodshed and suffering can, most regrettably, be expected.

There are thousands of people trying to find a solution to this problem. However the East Timorese people cannot go on waiting for assistance in building a better future for themselves and their children until this elusive acceptable political solution is found.

The Church in Australia, including ACR, should be prepared to accompany the Church in East Timor as it confronts the challenges facing it. This will require us to take those actions in the political, justice, development and relief area which the Church in East Timor requests. Much closer personal contact should be maintained with the Church in East Timor, using whatever avenues are open to us. The presence of foreigners in East Timor provides a window on what is going on to people, Governments and the Church outside. This presence is seen as important by the East Timorese. We should seek opportunities, maybe through relief or development programs, to have an Australian presence to provide this ongoing support and window for the East Timorese.